

Middlebury College Organic Garden

Advisor's Report for 2010

Internships

Through the generous support of alumni gifts and earned income from the garden's produce sales, the Middlebury College Organic Garden was able to offer full time summer internships to four undergraduate students : Sarah Simonds '11, Shane Scranton '12.5, Hannah McMeekin '12.5 and Max Odland '11. We also had two part time fall interns: Sara Bachmann '13.5 and Katie Willis '12 to help coordinate volunteers and help with harvest.

Also we hired two part time student mentors: Amanda Warren '11 and Rachel Pentecost '10.5 to work with two local schools, the Aurora School and the Cornwall Elementary to help them create gardens at their schools.

Production Garden

This summer brought an abundance of sunshine and many days above 90 degrees. We produced a bumper crop of vegetables, herbs and flowers. The garden again expanded to include several new planting areas that were previously in cover crops. Along with sales of produce to Middlebury College Dining Services we supplied food to Otter Creek Bakery, Jackson's on the River, the Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op, and the Farmer's Diner. The interns also donated several hundred pounds of crops to the Addison County Food shelf including 200 pounds of green beans picked by new students during fall orientation week.

The four student summer interns increased sales of garden produce by 25%. This increase came from a better understanding of our markets gained over 8 years experience at our site. For the first time we ran a farm stand in front of Hillcrest House the environmental center on Friday afternoon from 4-6 in September and October. Students could buy fresh produce from the garden. The stand was run by our two fall interns and was financially successful. It allowed the interns and volunteers who worked at the stand to educate the student customers about sustainable agriculture as well as offer samples of fresh, tasty vegetables, honey and berries to all who visited the stand.

Some of our increased production was due to a new fertility program we used this season. We kept a section of the garden out of production for four years. For the first two years we grew buckwheat and oats and turned them into the soil in the green stage. For the next two years we grew yellow sweet clover in that section, both to feed our honey bees (it is their favorite forage) and to put more nitrogen into the soil. This spring we tilled in the clover and planted cabbage, broccoli, green beans and winter squash. The yields were phenomenal and the taste of the produce was exceptional. As we look at possibilities of expanding the garden we see more opportunities to rest the soil and help restore its fertility.

Our honey harvest was a great success. Over 40 students participated in the honey extraction and bottling. Our yield was 37 pounds of very light colored predominantly clover honey.

Farm visits

Each summer the interns and I visit a variety of farms. Each focuses on different crops, finished goods and management systems. This year we visited the Crawford Family Farm (producers of Vermont Ayr cheese), Golden Russet Farm (organic vegetables and greenhouse plants), the Elmer Farm (organic vegetables), Champlain Valley Bees and Queen's (honey and nuclear colonies), Foggy Meadow (sustainably grown vegetables), The farms at the Intervale in Burlington, Dancing Cow Farm (farmstead cheese), Lincoln Peak Winery (run by Middlebury alumni Chris and Michaela Granstrom), Cate Farm (run by Middlebury alumni Richard Wiswall), Champlain Valley Orchard (fruit and vegetables), Bread and Butter Farm (run by Middlebury alum Corie Pierce) and the organic farm at Green Mountain College. Thanks to all of these generous farmers who gave so much of their time to show us their operations and answer our questions.

The Organic Garden in the News

A photo of the Organic Garden appeared in "Green Campus" a Sierra Club magazine as part of an article on environmental initiatives in higher education.

Gardeners in the Community

2009 garden intern Jessie Ebersole took over the lead role in the "gleaning" program in Addison County. Started by Middlebury graduate (and 2008 intern) Corinne Almquist, the Addison County gleaning worked with this year's interns and other students to harvest produce for several Addison County food shelves from the College garden as well as many farms. Along with 182 pounds of gleaned vegetables from our garden, this summer's interns raised 450 pounds of vegetables specifically for the Hope Food Shelf. Countywide, Corinne gleaned over 8000 pounds of fruit and vegetables.

Reunion 2010

For the fourth consecutive year we the interns and I hosted a tour of the garden at Reunion. Over 60 alumni visited the garden including several who were interns at the Organic Garden during their time at Middlebury

Faculty at the garden

Classes from the Anthropology, English, Psychology, Art and Architecture, Teacher Ed and Dance departments were held at the garden in spring and fall of 2010. Three students in Professor Helen Young's Plant Biology Course participated in a fall semester research project at the garden. They observed and cataloged fall blooming plants that attracted and sustained pollinators during the fall. With the help of Professor Young's classes and summer research interns we now have 5 years of data about insect pollinators and beneficial insects at the garden.

The Organic Garden as a Resource to other colleges and universities

Each year students and faculty from other colleges and universities inquire about the Middlebury College Organic Garden. They consistently ask for information that will help them create or sustain their own college gardens. This year I received inquiries from: Stanford University, University of Maryland, University of North Carolina, Bennington College, Lafayette College, Hamilton College, the College of New Jersey, Concordia College (MN), College of Central Arkansas, University of Buffalo and Duke University. The garden advisor and student/intern Amanda Warren attended the American Association of Sustainability in Higher Education national conference in October 2010 as panelists discussing the role and future of gardens in higher education. Our panel was very well attended and feedback from participants was very positive. One of the most consistent comments we heard was how fortunate we are to have such consistent and substantial support from our donors

New Projects

Garden expansion

The first meeting of the Organic Garden Advisory Group occurred in November with the goal to provide support and direction for implementation of the Organic Garden 5 year plan. The core of the group are organic farmers (and Midd alums) Corie Pierce, Meghan Osterhout and Richard Wiswall. Corie runs Bread and Butter Farm in Shelburne, VT. Corie taught organic farming at Michigan State University before beginning her diversified farm last year. Megan Osterhout has been farming vegetables near Manchester, VT for 4 years and also teaches at Burr and Burton Academy. Richard Wiswall has farmed for 30 years at his Cate Farm near Montpelier, VT. Richard runs all his greenhouses and most tractors on bio-diesel fuel he makes on the farm and also invented an electric cultivating tractor. He recently wrote a book about profitable farming. Former garden interns were represented by garden founders Jean Hamilton and Bennett Konesni and 2009 intern David Dolginow. Jessica Liebowitz, and Charlotte Tate represented the College Administration and Professor John Elder and Ashar Nelson represented faculty. Fourteen current Middlebury students also participated. The day began with a tour of the garden and then settled down to discussion about expanding food production for Middlebury Dining Services and directly to students through an on campus market stand operated by students. There was a focus on how to expand in a sustainable way. Farmers suggested using an electric cart to deliver produce to campus and electric cultivating tractor to minimize hand labor on larger plots. There was a lively discussion about creating a food studies program and how more faculty and administrative departments could be involved in this initiative. At the end of the meeting students organized into groups to begin planning for a barn that would use sustainable power to process and cool vegetables, research availability of electric powered vehicles for delivery and cultivation and meet with faculty and staff to further the goals of a Food Studies minor at Middlebury College.

Hoop House

This spring students built a 48 foot long hoop house that was used to grow warm weather crops. They grew tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and watermelon with great

success. As we continue to build the fertility of the soil in the hoop house we plan to use the house for season extension growing crops earlier in the spring and later in the fall.

Production Garden

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Academic Connections

Academic connections with the garden strengthened as faculty members in the departments of English, Geography, Dance, Biology, Sociology, Psychology and Art and Architecture brought classes to the garden. This fall several students from two of Dr. Helen Young's biology courses came to the garden to do research on insect pollinator habitat. Dr. Young's students are helping develop a list of plants that consistently attract populations of pollinators (especially honeybees and bumble bees) to our vegetables over the entire growing season. Students from John Mcleod's Intermediate Architecture Studio course are using the garden site to help students incorporate soils, topography, micro-climate and building usage in the design of energy efficient structures. Ross Conrad, organic bee keeper from Middlebury hosted a workshop about spring care for beehives at the garden.

We scheduled tours of the Organic Garden for 35 college faculty members from all over New England who were studying sustainable programs on college campuses, a tour for Katharine Milzoni, Sustainability Coordinator at Williams College and well as a tour for John Carroll professor of Environmental Studies at the University of New Hampshire.

Visitors to the garden in 2010.

On Fall Family Weekend we hosted a tour of the garden for students and families followed by a Harvest Festival dinner on campus. Student organizations using the garden included: Midnight Sky Astronomy Club, Community Friends mentoring group,

The Hillel club celebrated the Jewish harvest festival Sukkos which included the building of a Sukkah. The garden also hosted a gathering to celebrate John Elder upon his retirement from the faculty. John has been a consistent supporter of the garden since its inception.